

blind subjects of both sexes. Jastrow's findings were negative: there was, so far as he could tell, no evidence of visual imagery in the dreams of the congenitally blind nor of those subjects who became blind before the age of five or six. Ramsey knew of no subsequent work that had upset Jastrow's conclusions.

More recently, Berger, Olley and Oswald (*Quart. J. of Exper. Psych.*, 1962), using physiological techniques, studied the sleep patterns of three congenitally blind persons. No visual imagery was reported and, in particular, there was a complete absence of the characteristic eye movements that accompany dreaming in normal subjects.

Thus, it looks, at present, as if there is no evidence for the occurrence of visual imagery in the blind. Whether a more extensive search guided by Osborn's hypothesis might not bring some such cases to light is again another matter. If it were to do so, however, we should still have to decide whether this constituted evidence of paranormal cognition or whether it was a case of racial memory.

JOHN BELOFF

*Dept. of Psychology,
University of Edinburgh*

Dr Gauld and Mr Hall

SIR,—Concluding his review of Mr Hall's book on Edmund Gurney (*Journal*, June 1965, 53-62), Dr Gauld says that many of the issues discussed by him 'may seem unbearably trivial'. I agree, but the issues were chosen by himself. Many of those raised by Mr Hall are, in my opinion, by no means trivial. Indeed, I should have thought that that was almost the last word that could have been applied to them.

The book sets out to show that there is now ample evidence that Smith and Blackburn deceived the experimenters, that there is at least a probability that Smith was also deceiving them in the later series and that Gurney's death was not accidental but was a planned suicide. For this act Mr Hall suggests a reason.

Since 1908 when Blackburn's statements were made the Society has had ample time to inquire into the whole affair, just as they had ample time to ask Crookes for a written statement on the Cook-Showers mystery. With regard to Blackburn, all they did after the second of Blackburn's three statements was to get Miss Alice Johnson to prepare her 'private and confidential' pamphlet in order to defend Smith against Blackburn's accusations. Yet this extremely disingenuous publication which even Dr Gauld

thinks is 'unsatisfactory' was written two years after Sir Oliver Lodge's letter to Mr Piddington regarding the CAT episode (pp. 56-7). To get over this letter Dr Gauld adopts contortions even more bizarre than those he attributes to Mr Hall. I am not sure if he is asking us to believe that Lodge's memory was at fault or what he was supposed to be doing. What Dr Gauld does not tell us is that this letter was written on the very day that Blackburn's first article in *John Bull* appeared. With regard to Lodge's opinions it is to be noted that later he defended Smith stoutly against the 'scoundrel' Blackburn whose statements about the fraud he thought were 'worthy of no credence'. The subject of Blackburn's 'lies' was raised by Lodge in a review of Richet's *Traité de Métapsychique*, since the latter had apparently read the account of the affair so carelessly that he thought it was Smith who denied the validity of the tests and not 'Blackman', as he calls Blackburn.

Although Dr Gauld thinks that the CAT experiment could not have occurred, Miss Johnson and Mr Smith do not agree with him. The two discussed this episode, which they would hardly have done if it had never happened, but mention of this support for Mr Hall's assertions finds no place in Dr Gauld's review.

In his painstaking researches into these unfortunate incidents in the history of the Society Mr Hall is constantly being accused by his critics of making surmises, insinuations, and inadequately supported theories. The reason is not difficult to find. Owing to the wholesale destruction of the Society's archives, correspondence, scripts and records, ordered and sanctioned by the Council, the documents which might have provided some of the facts required are no longer extant while others which have escaped destruction and have remained unpublished by the Society have been discovered and printed by Mr Hall. Where, for instance, are the original notes of the Blackburn-Smith tests? Dr Gauld says he has seen the drawings, but where is the text? And has he made any attempt to trace Piddington's reply to Lodge or any reply following the receipt of that document?

Even if we cannot be sure what Dr Gauld's view is of the Blackburn-Smith affair, in spite of his statement that there is now direct evidence that Gurney and Myers were duped, we seem to be even less sure whether he thinks that Gurney did or did not suffer accidental death. It is true that he admits that there are some 'curious' features about this death. There are indeed. For a man of Gurney's eminence to visit a good hotel at Brighton possessing so little which would establish his identity is certainly odd, and the absence of a return ticket is also suggestive. But if

'Mr Hall's view of the supposed suicide will not stand up to examination' (p. 57), certainly Dr Gauld's theory will not. He seems to think that Dr Myers' caution was a sign that he was not wishing to fabricate a story. Dr Gauld thinks that if he had wished to cover up the suicide he could simply have said that Gurney generally used a local application of chloroform to relieve neuralgia. But this is exactly what he would *not* do. The jury, who were clearly not very satisfied, might have asked for evidence from Gurney's own physician or from his wife, and supposing that they had confirmed what Smith told me, namely that Gurney did not suffer from neuralgia, the jury's doubts might have considerably increased. Dr Gauld naturally tries to discredit Smith's testimony although he does not attempt to suggest any possible motive Smith may have had for lying about it. Although Smith told me that Gurney did not suffer from neuralgia he mentioned a curious habit he had in connexion with sleeping. The defence of the supposition that Gurney died an accidental death seems to me so weak that it is hardly worth rebutting, and I think that most reasonable people who read Mr Hall's book may agree with me.

In a few cases Dr Gauld's efforts to discredit Mr Hall seem due to the fact that he has not read the text with sufficient care. For example, he states (p. 61) that Mr Hall asserted that it seems impossible to believe that persons who were not actually mentally deranged could even momentarily consider that the physical phenomena of Spiritualism might be genuine. Such an assertion would, in my view, be very foolish; and it must be pointed out that Mr Hall made no such general statement. In the passage cited he is discussing the phenomena of certain mediums whose names he gives and is not making any sweeping assertion regarding the physical phenomena in general.

Space prevents me from dealing with many other points which deserve comment in Dr Gauld's review. Mr Hall's book has confirmed me in my opinion that Smith and Blackburn deceived the investigators and that the defence by Miss Johnson was of such a nature, in view of the facts known to her, that the candour and reliability of this lady were irretrievably damaged. Considering that Miss Johnson was one of the principal commentators of the Cross-correspondences, the implications of her behaviour are most disturbing and certainly far from trivial.

E. J. DINGWALL

[Dr. Dingwall feels that the central questions discussed in Mr Hall's book—viz., whether Smith and Blackburn deceived Gurney

and Myers, and whether Gurney committed suicide—are of importance. I do not agree. These questions may be of *interest*, at least to those who care for historical whodunits; but they could be of importance today only if the case for believing in ESP still rested to any extent upon the experiments in which Smith and Gurney participated. Since the case for believing in ESP manifestly does not so rest, I made no serious attempt in my review to decide one way or the other about the main issues with which Mr Hall's book deals. I do not in any case think it is possible to come to any very firm decision about either of them. I concentrated instead chiefly upon the issues which did seem to me to be of importance—Mr Hall's numerous allegations against the competence and even honesty of the Society's early leaders, allegations which, though individually trivial, mount up in sum to a seemingly formidable indictment. My claim is that nearly all of these allegations are misplaced, and that they should not be allowed to mount up. How is it possible to drive this claim home without descending to trivial examples? Indeed, one could hardly evaluate Mr Hall's treatment even of the Smith-Blackburn experiments and of the death of Edmund Gurney without delving into matters which seem trivial in comparison with the clear-cut theses propounded; for Mr. Hall builds up a good part of his case in regard to these matters through tenuous chains of inference in which surmises are treated as facts, and then used as the basis for further surmises. The points dealt with under the heading 4. below will serve as an example.

I will now comment upon some of the specific points raised by Dr Dingwall.

1. With regard to the CAT incident, it still seems to me highly probable that Lodge was confusing the Smith-Blackburn experiments with some other experiment. Lodge was writing twenty-five years after those experiments, and twenty years after Gurney's death. Our only contemporary information about the experiments is the account of them in *Proc. I*, and upon this account, whether inadequate or not, we must *faute de mieux* rely. Since, as I pointed out in my review, this account makes it quite plain that the CAT incident could not have occurred during the experiments in question, we have no choice but to set it aside. It is true that Smith discussed the supposed incident with Miss Alice Johnson; but his first reaction to her enquiries was to deny that any such incident took place. It was only after thinking the matter over for a night that he began to imagine possible explanations for it.

2. Even if the Council had sanctioned the wholesale destruction of the Society's archives, could that possibly excuse the conduct

of any person who remedied the lack with 'surmises, insinuations and inadequately supported theories'? And if Dr Dingwall seriously wishes to accuse the Council of making away with documents vital to the present issues it is incumbent upon him to show that such documents were once in the Society's possession. The only persons whose correspondence would be likely to throw light on the questions now at stake are Myers, Lodge, Gurney and the Sidgwicks. None of them bequeathed their papers to the Society. We still possess the drawings used in the Smith-Blackburn experiments; these drawings are annotated, but has Dr Dingwall reason for supposing that any further notes about the experiments were deposited with the Society? Or that the Society ever owned Piddington's reply (if any) to Lodge's letter?

3. I did not say that there is *now* direct evidence that Smith and Blackburn duped Gurney and Myers. There has been such evidence since Blackburn first published his 'confessions' in 1908. I claimed in my review, and still claim, that the new pieces of supposed direct evidence which Mr Hall brought forward in his book, and one of which he used as the basis for some unpleasant accusations of *suppressio veri* against the Society's early leaders, are quite valueless. Of course if one is not convinced that we have any good evidence for ESP of the kind supposedly exhibited in the Smith-Blackburn experiments—and personally I am not convinced of it—one is bound to suspect quite strongly that Smith and Blackburn cheated. But in view of Smith's earnest denials that he cheated—made at a time when he was financially quite independent of the Society—and of his continued interest in psychical research, I should hesitate to come down very heavily on Blackburn's side unless further light could be shed upon some considerable obscurities in his career and character. In preparing his account of Blackburn's later career and character Mr Hall draws largely upon an obituary notice of him which appeared in the *Tonbridge Free Press* for 5th April, 1929. Much of the information about Blackburn's ancestry, birth, parentage, education and career given in this obituary is either false or questionable; so is much of that given in other biographical notices of him, e.g. in *Men of the Times: Pioneers of the Transvaal and Glimpses of South Africa* (London, 1905), pp. 79–80, and in various editions of the *South African Who's Who*. Yet all this information must have originated from Blackburn himself. The fact about him that seems most clearly established is that he was pre-eminently a journalist with a keen eye for good copy (cf. the reminiscences of him by William Hills in the *Johannesburg Star* for 3rd April, 1929); according to his own accounts of himself he was many

times prosecuted for civil and criminal libel by the Transvaal Government.

4. The assurance with which Dr Dingwall states that Gurney had no personal possessions about him at the time of his death is quite astonishing. Gurney's supposed lack of personal possessions is an inference of, it seems to me, the most doubtful kind. Mr Hall arrives at it on p. 8 of his book on the grounds—surely far from overwhelming—that two obituary notices of Gurney state that his body was identified by an unposted letter in his pocket (the assumption being that he had nothing of a more personal nature about him). This letter was almost certainly addressed to Dr A. T. Myers. Now the assertion that Gurney's body was identified in this way occurs only in the two brief obituary notices; it does not occur in any of the full accounts of the inquest which appeared in local newspapers (cf. Hall, p. 6). It is very hard to believe that the authorities of the hotel where Gurney died had really any doubt as to his identity. The manageress gave evidence at the inquest; she described how she met Gurney on arrival and conducted him to his room, but she said nothing of any mystery as to who he was. Indeed, even had there been such a mystery, it is most unlikely that an examination of a letter addressed by Gurney to Arthur Myers would have resolved it. Arthur Myers was an intimate friend of Gurney's, and one does not sign one's letters to intimate friends with one's full signature. The point is nicely illustrated by the fact that Mr Hall's 'reconstruction' of the letter in question is signed simply 'Edmund'. If the letter had been as Mr Hall reconstructs it, it could not have served to identify Gurney's body. Unless we are prepared to assume in advance that Gurney, deliberately planning his suicide, signed the letter with his full name, we must dismiss the assertion that his body was literally identified from the unposted letter. But we can hardly just assume this in advance, for the thesis that Gurney was planning suicide is in part based upon the supposition that his body was literally identified from the unposted letter. No doubt it was because of the letter that Dr Myers was summoned to identify the body; but this identification would have been a *formal* one, and would certainly not have implied that Gurney had no personal possessions or marks of identity about him. All it would have implied would have been that among the persons referred to in whatever papers Gurney might have had in his possession, Dr Myers (as a medical man perhaps) seemed the most suitable to be asked to identify the body. My own guess is that the two obituary notices, neither of which show any special knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death, both

relied for information upon some second-hand source and that this source somehow garbled 'The body was formally identified by Dr A. Myers, who was contacted because a letter addressed to him was found in the deceased's pocket' into 'The body was identified by a letter', etc.

Whatever may have been the exact circumstances in which Edmund Gurney died—and I doubt whether we shall ever know for certain—I feel rather strongly that the specious arguments by which Mr Hall seeks to prove that he had no personal possessions about him when he died, and also those by which he hopes to show that the leaders of the S.P.R. conspired together to mislead the coroner's jury, do absolutely nothing to clarify matters.

5. I should have thought that Dr Myers's failure to state with certainty that Gurney ever used chloroform must have inclined the Jury to press for further information about Gurney's neuralgia and use of drugs far more than a firm statement that he commonly used a local application of chloroform would have done.

6. I must apologize if I gave the impression that Mr Hall makes the ridiculous assertion that only the insane could possibly suppose the physical phenomena of spiritualism to be genuine. I was not trying to 'discredit' him by so doing. The objections which I actually expressed were to his rather rash claims about the gullibility of the Society's early leaders, and about their ignorance of methods of deception.

ALAN GAULD]

Prejudiced Critics

SIR,—When one considers the three recent works of genuine, careful investigation and research—

(1) *The Spiritualists*, by Trevor H. Hall.

(2) 'Failure of a Quest', by Archie Jarman (*Tomorrow*, Winter 1964).

(3) *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney*, by Trevor H. Hall.

and then looks at their reception in this *Journal*, an unbiased member of the S.P.R. cannot help feelings of dismay. Particularly so, as the Society sets out its purpose as examination 'without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit'.

Surely it is extraordinary how reluctant many members appear to be to accept the evidence so plainly set before us? Why is it that the object of many members—even of those in the front rank—appears to be to distract attention from salient points and take every opportunity to fasten on less important or irrelevant detail? One can only ask—is this done, consciously or uncon-